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# Ecosystem Management

Navigating complexity and uncertainty in the Blue Mountains protected conservation area

Never Stand Still

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

School of Humanities & Languages



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**Course code/name:** IEST5008/Ecosystem Management

**Eligibility:** Postgraduate

**Units of credit:** 6 UOC

**Mode of study:** On-campus (3 days) and field trip (3 days) intensive. Distance mode not available.

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What do natural resource managers “manage”? How do we make sense of conservation, and navigate complexity and uncertainty in protected area management? These are the key questions that form the focus of this 6-day intensive course.

We target the Blue Mountains protected conservation area as a “case study” that is facing a host of challenges in our rapidly changing world. The interdisciplinary nature of ecosystem management in the context of a protected area is highlighted and a problem orientation framework is used to try to make sense of the wide range of factors involved in decision-making. Natural resource management is complex, based on significant uncertainty, and presents a wide range of challenges. The challenge of managing dynamic ecosystems is addressed along with balancing the ever-changing economic, political and socio-cultural demands.

The course is delivered through a combination of field immersion and lectures. We spend 3 days (2 nights) in the Blue Mountains, so students can see firsthand how active management of threats is important for conservation goals to be met. Students meet with and go into the field with professionals from government management agencies and with local ecologists, to confront on-ground management challenges such as fire, introduced species and continuation of Aboriginal cultural practices. Topics covered include biodiversity conservation; management of threats to biodiversity; drivers of ecosystem change such as fire, climate change and introduced species; balancing stakeholder interests and values; Aboriginal co-management; public engagement; knowledge generation, uptake and use; tourism and development impacts.

Using an interdisciplinary problem orientation framework that includes social process mapping, students will explore the social and biophysical processes of what is taking place in managing the environment, to unearth and work with the multitude of understandings, opinions, differences, tensions and assumptions. This exploration helps to clarify our purpose as environmental managers or conservationists. This way of working develops awareness and self-reflection, and enhances the understanding of our patterns of thought that shape our behaviours, defaults, and our values and beliefs. The ultimate goal is to engage with and understand our differences so that we can bring about more effective decision processes.

Who should do this course? As well as being for those passionate about nature and its care, the course is suitable for anyone interested in developing their skills in problem solving and analysis, especially with problematic issues in complex situations. No prior knowledge of ecosystems is required. Students are required to participate in bushwalking and a level of fitness is required. While this course is of particular relevance to students interested in conservation and management of ecosystems, and environmental policy processes and governance especially in the context of protected areas, importantly, the problem orientation framework used in the course presents an approach to understanding complex problems that can be applied to any field of work. The applied management focus prepares graduates as leaders in government and non-government, business, in environmental as well as non-environmental fields. There will be essential pre-course reading and writing to do so you will need to allow time in the month before the course starts (e.g. 4 hours per week for 2 weeks), as well as during the weekend before the final day of the course. If necessary, students can do the course remotely and attend just for the 3-day field trip (the field trip is mandatory attendance).



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